

Segment 5

The lessons we've learned from research on the transition into adulthood suggests that there are ways that we can strengthen pathways into adult life through key institutions and social policies. I'd like to talk about three domains outside of four year colleges and universities. First, community colleges are ideal targets for intervention. They touch large numbers of people, a wide variety of young people, they serve many purposes, they're flexible, and they offer connections to a wide range of potential career paths. We too often equate success in early adulthood with getting a four year college degree and those with anything else feel like failures. The college for all mantra really leaves in the shadows many other important but alternative routes into adulthood. A key challenge is how to foster success for those who don't have the desire, the skills, or the finances to pursue four year degrees. In addition, some young people, due to disabilities and mental health issues or other concerns may face unique challenges in attending four year institutions and may require significant accommodations and support or require longer times to degree completion. As access to four year institutions have broaden, colleges and universities are building the array of services and programs to support first year students, especially first generation college students and students from underrepresented groups. Many local or regional community colleges and four year institutions are also trying to better coordinate courses and policies so that students have a smoother experience as they move across institutions. Second, civic engagement and service learning programs in many schools and workplaces offer important opportunities to build skills and networks, to explore social and political attitudes and values, to contribute to communities, and to develop a larger sense of purpose and meaning in life. Third, the military also serves many young people. For most young people who enlist, it is an institution of first choice, not a second choice institution. Like four year residential colleges and universities, it provides a setting in which young people learn to work and live and learn. With guidance and mentoring, the military can help young people acquire skills and foster a sense of competence and it can provide a bridge to higher education.